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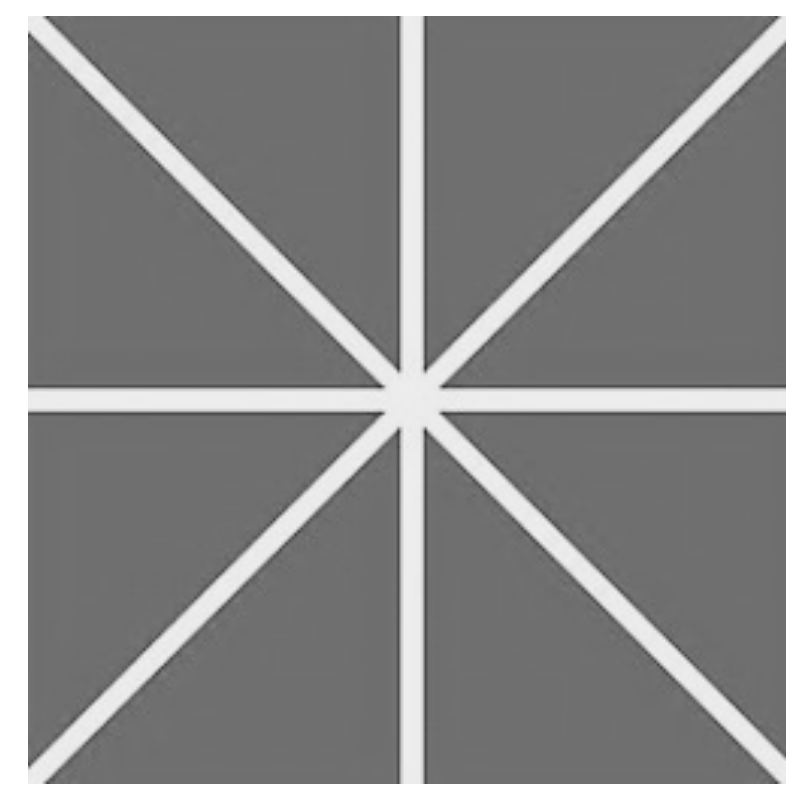
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# K-Pop Or K-Death? Korean Music and Entertainment Industry Seeks To Mirror 1940s Hollywood Contract System Oppression

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## Introduction

When a smart business model is considered to be profitable for the managers and owners at the top, it is clear that they are profiting off the blood and sweat of the talent they contractually and ideologically own. This is considered normal in the South Korean entertainment industry, as normal as the Hollywood studio system contracts were in the days of vertical integration in the late 1930s to 1940s (Stahl). The similarities are staggering, and allow the opportunity to see why such a system is oppressive, no matter how strongly it is supported and believed in by the community in which it operates.

## Hypothesis

I argue that there is a symbiotic relationship between the contractual system that has existed in the golden age of cinema in the 1930s-1940s that has resurfaced in South Korea, and because of this mentality, many of the western ideals from decades ago are still in use today.

## Research Method

The difficulty of researching this topic made for an interesting method of research. Since there is very little information on K-Pop, as it is a new and growing industry, much of my information came from news websites and blogs. As an academic student, this is a hard reality to face, seeing as students are told to never trust blogs. However, through research of the validity of the words of these websites by cross-examining their information with other academic sources, I was able to use this method of research.

*"I could be forced to do anything the studio told me to do. ... You could only starve, which of necessity made you give in to the demands of the studio (Balio p. 143)"*

*"I was called to a bar and pressured to accept a request for a sexual relationship," she wrote according to the report. ... Park questioned the pressure on celebrities to keep in the public eye, saying those 'who do not make frequent appearances are treated as losers. To avoid this, they often go too far (Park).'"*

**Quote 1.** This are two quotes from two performers, one in the Hollywood Golden-Age era and an actress who committed suicide under K-Pop oppression.

## Results

To understand the symbiotic relationship that exists between the Golden Age of cinema and South Korea's pop culture, there are very important facts to understand about cinema in the 1930s. Vertical integration is what made the 1930s cinema so profitable and such a strong business model. These integrated elements are considered the following: "production (using actors, sets, and film), distribution (passing motion picture prints from producer to exhibitor and from exhibitor to exhibitor). and exhibition (showing motion picture prints to the final consumer) (Hanssen 520)." These three elements were integral to the success of the Golden Age.



Image 1. [www.gokpop.com](http://www.gokpop.com)



Image 2. Girl Group Called "Girls Generation" uses unity in appearance for ease in replacing the members in the group. ([www.hiexpat.com](http://www.hiexpat.com))

## Conclusions

The symbiotic relationship between the 1940s and K-Pop is clear. By re-purposing the means of production, distribution, and exhibition to fit Korean standards today. These companies own their performers, in mind, body and spirit. Correlating to the 1940s means and the Korean means of today, the Korean side is missing the one component that stopped the 1940s from getting out of hand when it came to control the lives of its actors: political action.

What ended this vertical integration and the so-called Golden Age of Cinema, was the *Paramount Decision*, however, South Korea has yet to show signs of coming to a political policy like that. The same kind of vertical integration is happening for South Korea's rising industry, and it shows no signs of stopping. Following the same means that film follows, but with the performers and the revenue these companies make, the similarities are uncanny. For the means of production, this entails the artist training and the production of their image and music. For the distribution, these companies control this as well, since they consider themselves the "owners" of these artists, they're never seen as independent from the company that owns them, since they monetarily owe these corporations so much in training and distribution fees (Cain). Exhibition is considered as the tours and the publication of these groups, how overworked the artists are, in terms of forcing them to work hard and work around the clock for their group ("Dongho Quit Kpop").



Image 3. [rossgardenersblog.wordpress.com](http://rossgardenersblog.wordpress.com)



Image 4. [www.fanpop.com](http://www.fanpop.com)

## Conclusions (continued)

There is a saying in Korea, which is from the article "South Korean Starlet's Suicide Is A Real Life Drama" by Jun-Min Park, "To stick out like a nail is to risk it getting hammered down" which means to try and make a difference and to speak out against the societal constructs has no place in Korean society. These people are expected to keep their heads in the sand and work hard their entire lives. This is where the traditional constructs still exists in Korea. Because a certain artist has talent and beauty, when given the opportunity they are expected to become these K-Pop Idols, it is their duty, because these gifts were given to them.

K-Pop alone generates billions of dollars each year, and has quickly become Korea's largest export (Asia, Forbes). Fans from all over Asia have grown to love K-Pop and the international fan base is astonishing, even a large fan base out in America. When Korean Idols go on tour, they go just about everywhere, besides their own country they travel all over the globe in order to reach all of their fans. The Forbes article even attributes the success to the training system they have for the K-Pop Idols, since these artists deliver again and again the successful routines and performances that have generated an international appreciation. The guarantee of results is why there are the "big 3" in terms of monetary success.

The Korean people are not ignorant to the facts, however. They know that their favorite idol has numerous plastic surgeries and eats air for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Yet, they see nothing wrong with this and they Idolize it even more. For the ruthless system to stop, there needs to be political action, otherwise the system that was put in place in the 1940s will run rampant through Korea forever, creating a new tradition of abusing artists for monetary gain.

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